DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 122 184 CG 010 515

AUTHOR Orthner, Dennis K.
TITLE Toward a Theory of Leisure and Marital Interaction: A Test and Reformulation.
PUB DATE Aug 75
NOTE 12p.; Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the National Council on Family Relation (Salt Lake City, August 19-23, 1975)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage
DESCRIPTORS *Communication Problems; Correlation; Family Life; *Family Relationship; Feedback; *Interaction Process Analysis; *Leisure Time; *Marriage; Relationship; Research Projects

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the relationship between the extent of shared participation of husbands and wives in leisure activities and the extent of communication and task sharing in the marriage. Because marriage is an interactional system and leisure activities vary in their interactional requirements, a theory is proposed linking leisure activity patterns to marital interaction. The hypotheses generated by the theory were tested on a random sample of 223 husbands and 228 wives. The results indicate that interaction in leisure activities is related to interaction in marriage but that this relationship varies over the marital career. Also, it was found that the hypothesized relationship was greater when openness of communication was used as the marital interaction indicator compared to household task sharing. The theory is then reformulated in light of the data analysis. (Author)

****
* Documents acquired by ERIC include many informal unpublished *
* materials not available from other sources. ERIC makes every effort *
* to obtain the best copy available. Nevertheless, items of marginal *
* reproducibility are often encountered and this affects the quality *
* of the microfiche and hardcopy reproductions ERIC makes available *
* via the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). EDRS is not *
* responsible for the quality of the original document. Reproductions *
* supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made from the original. *
****

ED122184

TOWARD A THEORY OF LEISURE AND MARITAL INTERACTION:

A TEST AND REFORMULATION

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

Dennis K. Orthner, Ph. D.
Department of Child Development and
Family Relations
University of North Carolina
Greensboro, N.C. 27412

Prepared for presentation at the Theory Construction Workshop, National Council on Family Relations; Salt Lake City, Utah; August, 1975.

Because of page limitations, the bibliography is not as extensive as it should be. Interested readers are invited to request a more complete copy of the paper which should be available shortly.

Theory and research concerning the relationship between leisure and the family has been disappointedly lacking (cf. Cunningham and Johannis, 1960; Dumazedier, 1967). Family specialists are much more aware of the potential impacts of work or other obligatory pursuits on the family than they are of the potential effects of leisure time and leisure activities. Even theories of sexual relations or marital conflict fail to adequately take into account the discretionary nature of the time frame during which these activities typically occur. Leisure as both a median for interaction and as a system of interactional patterns itself must be adequately accounted for in theories of the family if we are to explain and predict family phenomenon.

The purpose of the present paper is to redevelop the theoretical propositions proposed in an earlier paper (Orthner, 1974) based on research findings designed to test them. Consideration will initially be given to the foundation of the theory, then to the research design and results, and finally to redeveloping the theory in light of the investigation.

LEISURE AND MARITAL INTERACTION

First of all, leisure as a concept appears to have several inherent qualities that are relevant to our understanding of interpersonal relations. Lesire, for example, assumes an element of personal liberty that is associated with discretionary time and activity. In this sense, it tends to free the individual from obligations and encourages receptivity to new stimuli and other persons. Leisure encompasses an attitudes of mind associated with a pleasurable definition of the situation and, therefore, functions to relax, divert, and encourage the development of the person or the interpersonal relationship. During leisure, individuals or groups are more free to experience new forms of behavior while remaining socially accepted in both their old and new roles.

Leisure activities also provide characteristics that can be transferred from the activity setting to other social situations. Role playing and experimentation may be more free in some leisure pursuits allowing styles of interaction that are less conventional to the normal processes of the group. This may even allow recreation to develop a somewhat unique existence with its own norms, environment, and moral order (Kaplan, 1960). Group cohesiviness is fostered in that the sharers of the experience are then encouraged to develop a sense of solidarity, respect, and relatedness (Goffman, 1961), reinforcing bonds of intimacy and exclusivity (see also Orthner, 1975b).

Thus, while leisure is situationally and individually determined, it has important implications for group relations. This is especially true as it appears to influence communication channels, role patterning, and interpersonal affect. Each of these variables is critical to an understanding of marital interaction.

Symbolic interaction theory would appear to provide a workable framework for linking the concept of leisure to that of marriage and marital interaction. This theory suggests that group members interpret the actions of each other and of themselves in relation to their definition of the situation. Significant others, inside or outside the group, provide symbolic feedback regarding these definitions and can alter behavioral patterning and the type of relationship that exists (Stryker, 1964).

Following this line of reasoning, if communication channels between a husband and wife are blocked or restricted, new situational definitions are not given an opportunity to be exchanged and the relationship stabilizes upon previously defined definitions. Likewise, if the division of labor in the family reinforces separate responsibilities and tasks, this will retard the ability of the participants to take the role of the other, furthering reducing definitional feedback. The degree of interpersonal affect also influences this process because this determines how "significant" the other is perceived and, therefore, the degree to which the perceptions of the other can influence situational definitions and potential interaction.

Leisure may engender special significance at this point. During discretionary time, the individual in certain circumstances may be encouraged to redefine situations and open himself to new behavioral interpretations. The above framework would suggest, however, that it is not the time itself but how the time is used interactionally that is most important. That is, some activities generate little or no interaction or symbolic feedback while for others, interaction is required by the activity (see Orthner, 1975b for further discussion of this).

Activities which are carried out alone, individual activities, have the common characteristic of not directly influencing the feedback mechanisms of the relationship. However, if they become the dominant leisure pattern for the marriage, then they may break down definitional interdependency between family members and encourage each person to develop their own world with its own satisfactions. It would appear that activities that may even be shared but require little interaction among the participants function in the same way. These parallel activities, such as T.V. viewing or going to the theater, are not unlike individual activities in a group setting. There are few requirements for direct communication. Situational definitions and interpersonal feedback is enhanced somewhat, however, by the latent communication impact of the common stimuli and the fact that the persons are co-participants.

In contrast to these activity forms, some leisure pursuits require interaction of the participants for successful completion of the activity. These joint activities, such as game playing, partying, or camping, encourage more open communication, provide feedback regarding definitions of the situation, and may develop alternate role relationships for the participants. Joint activities, if desired, may also increase interpersonal affect to the extent that a better understanding of the other increases their significance in the interactive process.

This is not to say that leisure activities are the prime movers in marital interaction. If a relationship is characterized by a lower degree of communication or sharing, then it is predicted that the participants will reduce their co-participation in joint activities because this is likely to place greater stress on their definition of the situation. Individual and parallel activities are likely to be more comfortable to persons in these relationships. Likewise, if the communication patterns are rather closed, as in traditional relationships, higher amounts of joint activities may produce more feedback than the individuals in the relationship can cope with. The process of selecting activities, therefore, appears to be somewhat circular with persons or groups choosing those activities that reinforce their relational definitions and the leisure activities in turn further reinforce these definitions.

It should be noted that the relationships just described are not likely to be as perfectly represented in reality. First of all, the categories of joint

and parallel are not as discrete as the ideal-type format suggests; some activities are going to be more joint or parallel than others. Adequate measures of the degree of interaction in various activities are not available at this time. Second, despite an underlying similarity the same activity will be engaged in differently by different persons and, therefore, may exhibit interactional characteristics which are somewhat situational. Third, there are many factors both internal and external to the marital relationship that can influence the interactional nature of the marriage or participation in some leisure activities and these continually influence the leisure and marital processes.

Given these limitations, the following propositions appear to follow from the assumptions that have been developed:

There is a positive relationship between the proportion of leisure time spent in joint activities and the degree of intra-spouse communication and the degree of family task sharing in other settings.

There is a negative relationship between the proportion of leisure time spent in individual activities and the degree of intra-spouse communication and the degree of family task sharing in the settings.

There is no relationship between the proportion of leisure time spent in parallel activities and the degree of intra-spouse communication and the degree of family task sharing in other settings.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The data for the study were collected from the population of non-student, intact, upper-middle class husbands and wives living in the urbanized area of a Southeastern U.S. city in March, 1973. A stratified area probability sample of households was derived by using median home values from the 1970 U.S. Census block areas. A structured questionnaire was introduced to 317 qualified husbands and 317 qualified wives. These were returned by 223 husbands and 228 wives, a response rate of 73 percent.

Leisure activity participation was measured by an index of leisure interaction. This contained a listing of 96 possible activities which had been previously judged by experts into the three leisure activity patterns. The respondents were asked to indicate which activities they had participated in, with whom, and how much time was given to each. The proportions were derived by the number of hours spent over the previous weekend in each of these three activity categories divided by the total number of leisure activity-hours. The degree of openness of marital communication was determined by a ten-item index abstracted from the Marital Communication Inventory (Bienvenu, 1870). The items selected were those that measured the extent to which husbands and wives desired to communicate or opened themselves to communicate with their spouse. The degree of task sharing in the marriage was determined by the proportion of selected responsibilities in the home which were accomplished by both spouses. A list of 15 family tasks from the Division of Family Responsibilities Instrument by Olsen (1960) was introduced to the respondents to measure this. This is not viewed as an inclusive list but merely as instrumental in determining the relative differences in task sharing in marriage.

(Note: The attention of the reader is directed toward an article by Orthner (1975a) for a much more complete discussion of the research design and the Leisure Activity-Interaction Index.)

RESULTS

With regard to the hypothesized positive relationship between joint-spouse activity participation and open marital communication, the data is supportive for both husbands ($r = .23$, s .001) and wives ($r = .13$, s .02). The hypothesized negative relationship between individual activity participation and open marital communication is also supported for both husbands ($r = -.15$, s .02) and wives ($r = -.21$, s .001). The hypothesis of no relationship between the proportion of time spent in parallel activities and open marital communication is supported for husbands ($r = .10$, not significant) but not for wives ($r = .13$, s .03). In general, it was found that the greater the frequency of interaction in the leisure activities selected by the respondents, the greater the shared communication in the marriage. For wives, however, the differences between parallel and joint activity participation were not as different as for husbands. Further analysis is needed to better explain this relationship.

The data relating leisure activity participation and task differentiation in marriage is much less clear in the initial results. There appears to be no significant relationship between the proportion of time spent in joint activities and family task sharing for either husbands ($r = .07$) or wives ($r = .08$). As predicted, individual activities are negatively related to task sharing but this is only significant for the wives ($r = -.15$, s .01), not for the husbands ($r = -.08$). Parallel activity participation rates are positively related to family task sharing for wives ($r = .16$, s .01) but not significantly so for husbands ($r = .09$, not significant). The failure to find results consistent with the hypotheses is disappointing but somewhat surprising is the finding that parallel activity participation is more positively related to marital task sharing than joint activity participation.

Because an earlier examination of the correlation between leisure activities and marital satisfaction had indicated that the number of years married or marital career period was a significant variable (Orthner, 1975a), it was decided to control on this in the present analysis as well. Table I gives the correlation coefficients for the hypothesized relationships in each of five marital career periods: 0 to 5 years, 6 to 11 years, 12 to 17 years, 18 to 23 years, and 24 years or more.

Looking first to the marital communication variable, it is evident that leisure activities are most indicative of open marital communication during the early years of the marriage and the launching years represented by Period IV. Individual activities are most negatively related and joint and parallel activities most positively related to communication among persons in those years. It must be remembered, nevertheless, that this is cross-sectional, not longitudinal, data and couples in Period IV may be quite different in their expectations and are probably less companionate in their orientations than those in Period I. This may in part explain why parallel-spouse activity participation is adequate for more open marital communication in Period IV resulting in higher correlations for parallel than joint activities at that time. Husbands and wives in period I are more likely to have been socialized toward companionate expectations and they follow the hypothesized pattern of the model. The relationships reported in periods II, III, and V, however, appear to indicate that during the childrearing and post-parental periods leisure activities are only marginally indicative of communication openness in marriage.

Table 2 provides an even clearer picture of the relationships that have just been summarized. This table provides an examination of the proportions of time spent in the three leisure activity patterns for each marital career period among those in the upper and lower-thirds on the marital communication index. Among the wives, the higher marital communication group maintains consistently lower participation rates in individual activities, and higher rates in the joint and parallel activities compared to the lower communication group. The data for husbands is not quite as consistent for all of the periods, but follows the same basic pattern. This lends support to the hypotheses presented earlier. Of special interest is the fact that the differences in proportions between the higher and lower communication groups can be seen most clearly in Periods I and IV. The reason for more similarity in the influences of joint and parallel activities in the latter period would appear to be caused by a decline in participation rates in joint activities but stability over time of those proportives in parallel activities. This results in more similarity between joint and parallel participation during Period IV compared to Period I indicating that shared experiences per se, even if paralle, may be as valuable to the older couples as highly interactive experiences were to the younger couples.

When the relationship between the leisure activity patterns and marital task sharing is examined over the five marital career periods, a somewhat different picture emerges. The anticipated negative influence of individual activities is only supported in Period I for husbands and Period V for wives. Joint activities appear to indicate their highest predictive value for task sharing in Period II with very little influence in the first and fourth periods. Furthermore, parallel activities are more positively related to family task sharing compared to joint activities in each marital career period for both husbands and wives. This relationship is significant for the first two periods among husbands and for all the marital periods except Period III among wives.

The question as to why these results are so different can be partially explained by examining Table 3. First of all, consistent with the hypothesis, those persons that are more likely to share household tasks are less likely to participate in individual activities. This is true in all but Period V for husbands. Also, consistent with the hypothesis is the finding that in four of the five periods for both husbands and wives, the proportions of time spent in joint activities activities are the same or higher among the high task sharing group compared to the low task sharing group. The biggest differences, however, occur in the last two marital career periods. It would appear that there are normative pressures on younger marrieds to participate in joint leisure activities resultings in consistently high participation rates for both groups. However, those that are most used to sharing in their non-leisure activities spend much higher proportions of time in parallel activities as well resulting in parallel activities being the better predictor of the role patterning in the marriage. During the next marital career period, when children are usually present, the high task sharers increase their proportionate participation in joint pursuits and reduce their parallel activities to offset this increase. In contrast, those that are less likely to share family responsibilities reduce their joint activities and increase their parallel participation rates. This would appear to be a time of separation in the leisure patterns of the more companionate compared to more traditional married couples. Except in the case of Period III for wives, each of the other remaining periods for husbands and wives retain the pattern of joint participation being greater than parallel participation among the high task sharers compared to the low task sharers.

REFORMULATION OF THE THEORY

The theory of leisure and marital interaction as originally proposed would appear to be too simple to account for the results of the data analysis. It is apparent that there are several additional considerations that must be included in the theory for it to better explain this relationship and develop more adequate hypotheses.

First of all, it has been assumed thatleisure activities transfer many of their interactional attributes from the discretionary setting to other settings and that this is regular process. However, it would appear from the data that younger marrieds are normatively expected to participate in a particular level of joint activities and this pressure mitigates the actual transfer of the qualities of the activity. This suggests that there are degrees of voluntarism in leisure involved that need to be accounted for in an interactional theory. Taking this into account, it might be better to hypothesize that the degree of interaction in leisure activities is positively related to the degree of interaction in non-leisure settings when the leisure activities are initiated out of mutual interest by the participants themselves. This allows a better prediction of the lack of relationship between joint leisure participation and marital task sharing in younger married, for example.

It is also apparent that the assumed similar influence of leisure activities on marital communication and task differentiation is not appropriate. The proposed theory indicated that higher levels of interaction in leisure had the elements of higher levels of symbolic communication and increased opportunities for role taking and that these should in turn be related to increases in communication and role sharing in non-leisure settings. This fails to take into account, however, constraints that may be placed on the persons involved to increase their levels of communication or alter the roles that they enact. The data suggest that increased leisure interaction is more likely to influence communication than role sharing. This is probably because the determination of household responsibilities is more culturally and sub-culturally defined and less subject to change than acceptance of the other as significant and, therefore, accessable to communication. It might be expected, then, that the degree of interaction in leisure activities is positively related to the degree of interaction in non-leisure settings only to the extent that communication or role sharing with the other are culturally reinforced or deemed appropriate by the participants. This might explain why the relationships in the last marital career period examined typically drop off. Expectations for more institutional or traditional marriage models may be more likely among the older respondents in the study. It is also interesting to note that among wives the relationships tend to be either more positive for shared activities or more negative for individual activities. This follows from the reformulation because women are receiving more reinforcement today for family interaction than men and may be, therefore, more influenced by their leisure activities.

Another factor that must be accounted for in this theory is the degree of significance of the other. It has been assumed that the spouse is a most significant other and tha interaction in one setting would lead to accomodative interaction in another setting in order to receive appropriate symbolic feedback from that other. However, it appears that the significance of the marital partner changes over the marital career, especially as other significant persons enter into the relationship. In the data, marked shifts in relationships are noted from the first identified marital career period to the second. As

parental roles and responsibilities increase, for many couples the children become as significant as the marital partners. Communication may center around them rather than the adults. Family roles may be expanded and determined more by the children and childrearing than by the marriage. In this situation, the degree of significance of the marital partner is effectively reduced and interaction with them is less likely to influence interaction in other situations. This is not to suggest that children are the only relevant case. Occupational, educational, or other non-marital commitments are also likely to lead to similar results. It is hypothesized, therefore, that the degree of interaction in leisure activities is positively related to the degree of interaction in non-leisure settings to the extent that the participants view each other as significant.

The results of this analysis should not be taken to mean that a theory of leisure and marital interaction is highly situational and unpredictable. It does indicate that such a theory must account for a larger number of variables than originally proposed. It might be suggested that future research measure leisure participation over several different time periods to establish a greater sense of order in the variables under investigation. This would diminish somewhat the situational nature of sampling from any one single time period and assuming that this is normal. It should be noted that the present research design minimized the problems of dealing with a limited activity period by examining only the interactional patterns that occurred during leisure time, not the actual activities themselves.

In conclusion, the inductive process that has been described appears to have enhanced the credibility of the proposed theory of leisure and marital interaction. The symbolic interaction framework has been demonstrated to be appropriate for deductively generating testable hypotheses and flexible enough to account for changes in the model after data analysis. Further research is certainly indicated but the present paper demonstrates some of the directions that this research might fruitfully take. The net result of this exchange between theory and research should be a better understanding of the family as a dynamic system.

Table 1: Correlation (r) Between Leisure Activity Patterns and Two Measures of Marital Interaction over the Marital Career

Activity Patterns/Interaction Measures	Marital Career Period I	II	III	IV	V
Marital Communication Index					
Husbands (N)	(26)	(35)	(45)	(31)	(72)
Individual Activities	-.50**	-.09	.09	-.39**	-.03
Joint Activities	.42**	.12	.08	.37*	.18
Parallel Activities	.31	-.19	.14	.43**	.04
Wives (N)	(27)	(37)	(49)	(31)	(75)
Individual Activities	-.31*	-.02	-.15	-.42**	-.16
Joint Activities	.24	-.13	.15	.22	.09
Parallel Activities	.11	.18	.13	.31*	.08
Marital Task Sharing Index					
Husbands (N)	(25)	(3[illegible])	(43)	(31)	(71)
Individual Activities	-.34*	-.00	-.00	-.01	-.04
Joint Activities	.01	.27	-.21	.05	.09
Parallel Activities	.51**	-.43**	.10	.20	.16
Wives (N)	(26)	(36)	(47)	(31)	(74)
Individual Activities	-.24	.08	-.02	-.18	-.25*
Joint Activities	-.05	.29*	-.18	.08	.14
Parallel Activities	.51**	-.39**	.23	.33*	.19*

* Significant at the .05 level
** Significant at the .01 level

Table 2: Proportions of Discretionary Time Spent in the Leisure Activity Patterns According to High (upper-third) and Low (lower-third) Scores on the Openness of Marital Communication Index

Activity Patterns	Communication Index Scores: High					Low				
	Marital Career Periods									
	I	II	III	IV	V	I	II	III	IV	V
Husbands - N	9	10	17	6	32	8	10	16	13	24
Individual Activities	.19	.30	.32	.35	.31	.36	.29	.27	.45	.30
Joint Activities	.49	.44	.37	.28	.34	.30	.40	.38	.18	.30
Parallel Activities	.27	.17	.27	.27	.32	.20	.28	.24	.21	.29
Wives - N	7	15	20	8	33	11	12	11	14	19
Individual Activities	.26	.29	.30	.35	.37	.36	.34	.34	.46	.43
Joint Activities	.38	.38	.39	.25	.29	.31	.38	.39	.21	.28
Parallel Activities	.26	.20	.28	.29	.29	.25	.18	.27	.23	.23

Table 3: Proportions of Discretionary Time Spent in Leisure Activity Patterns According to High (upper-third) and Low (lower-third) Proportions of Tasks Shared in the Marriage

Activity Patterns	Proportions of Tasks Shared: High					Low				
	Marital Career Periods									
	I	II	III	IV	V	I	II	III	IV	V
Husbands - N	9	15	16	13	25	9	13	14	14	29
Individual Activities	.19	.32	.29	.36	.31	.35	.33	.33	.40	.29
Joint Activities	.36	.44	.31	.30	.36	.36	.34	.37	.24	.33
Parallel Activities	.35	.15	.26	.27	.31	.14	.29	.23	.23	.31
Wives - N	9	15	19	13	27	10	15	15	14	30
Individual Activities	.28	.32	.34	.36	.34	.50	.32	.39	.49	.41
Joint Activities	.33	.44	.31	.26	.33	.33	.31	.36	.21	.27
Parallel Activities	.36	.15	.27	.25	.28	.13	.26	.19	.21	.26

REFERENCES

Bienvenu, Millard J.
1970 "Measurement of marital communication." The Family Coordinator 19:26-31.

Cunningham, Kenneth R. and Theodore B. Johannis, Jr.
1960 "Research on the family and leisure: a review and critique of selected studies." Family Life Coordinator 9:25-32.

Dumazedier, Joffre
1967 Toward a Society of Leisure. New York: Free Press.

Goffman, Erving
1961 Encounters: Two Studies in the Sociology of Interaction. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill.

Kaplan, Max
1960 Leisure in America: A Social Inquiry. New York: Wiley.

Olsen, Marvin E.
1960 "Distribution of family responsibilities and social stratification." Journal of Marriage and the Family 22:60-65.

Ortner, Dennis K.
1974 "Toward a theory of leisure and family interaction." Paper presented at the meeting of the Pacific Sociological Association, San Jose, California; March, 1974.

1975a "Leisure activity patterns and marital satisfaction over the marital career." Journal of Marriage and the Family 37:91-102.

1975b "Familia Ludens: Reinforcing the leisure component in family life." The Family Coordinator 24:175-183.

Strykor, Sheldon
1964 "The interactional and situational approaches." In Harold Christensen (ed.). Handbood of Marriage and the Family. Chicago: Rand McNally.